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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)*
OF THE 78th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 21 September 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BADRAN

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* The summary records of the second part (closed) and of the third part (public) of the meeting appear as documents CRC/C/SR.78/Add.1 and CRC/C/SR.78/Add.2, respectively.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS RELEVANT TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE (agenda item 6) (continued) (CRC/C/16)

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS (agenda item 9) (continued) (A/CONF.157/23)

1. Mr. MOMBESHORA noted that many members of the Committee had underscored the need for urgent action. The early-warning activities referred to by Mrs. Santos Pais should be examined more carefully so that the Committee could be in a position to take preventive measures. He hoped that that approach could be pursued together with the other treaty bodies.

2. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that three important conferences were being planned for the near future: the World Conference on Women, the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit on Social Development. Children tended to be the victims of economic reforms implemented without due consideration as to their social impact. It would be wise for the Committee to decide at the current time whether it wished to play a role at those conferences and how it might ensure that children's rights were given appropriate attention at those events.

3. The CHAIRPERSON noted that the forthcoming international conference on the family was also of interest to the Committee. She asked for suggestions on how the Committee might interact with those conferences.

4. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that the rights of individual members of the family had been discussed in the framework of the preparations for the International Year of the Family. The Committee might draft a paper on the family and the child, and information on the Committee's activities might appear in the bulletin issued in the context of those preparations.

5. When the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been adopted, concern had been voiced in some countries that recognition of the rights of the child might diminish those of parents and constitute a threat to the unity of the family. The Committee should seek to make clear that the family could be the first stage for imparting democratic attitudes to children.

6. Concerning the World Summit on Social Development, she saw possible areas of interaction in connection with the need to achieve greater equity and solidarity and a redistribution of available resources, combat marginalization and ensure social participation, with particular reference to the impact of those issues on children's lives.

7. The Committee should also try to improve its cooperation with the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), and she proposed that a letter should be sent to the Directorate of that body, emphasizing the importance of UNESCO's role in the various activities of the Committee.

8. The Committee must strive to improve its links with the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch in Vienna, which could give support on substantive issues of relevance to the Committee. The Crime Prevention and Criminal

Justice Branch also had a broad programme of technical assistance throughout the world, in countries such as Costa Rica, Peru, Sudan, Namibia and Viet Nam whose reports had recently been or would soon be considered by the Committee. The Committee had not been sufficiently aware of those activities.

9. The CHAIRPERSON asked the Secretariat to write to UNESCO stressing the importance that the Committee attached to cooperation with that body.

10. Mrs. EUFEMIO said that the Committee's fifth session might take up the question of the child in the family; issues such as the family environment and alternative care might be considered in a general discussion, or alternatively in pre-sessional meetings.

11. The CHAIRPERSON asked Mrs. Santos Pais to report to the Committee on the events planned in preparation for the International Conference on Population and Development.

12. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS agreed to do so. She also noted that a number of conferences were planned at regional level which the Committee might wish to attend.

13. Mrs. BELEMBAOGO said that several regional events on the subject of the family were scheduled for 1994. She was in favour of the Committee attending the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Conference on Women and the World Summit on Social Development. As the International Conference on Population and Development would be held in Cairo, the Committee might ask the Chairperson to attend on its behalf and to present a paper. It might also inquire of the secretariats of those Conferences to see whether a deferment of expenses was possible.

14. She was surprised at the absence of UNESCO, especially as that body had a number of educational programmes based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNESCO had recently held a conference in Burkina Faso on the education of girls, which had been attended by virtually all African Ministers of Education. The so-called Declaration of Ouagadougou adopted at that conference called upon African States to make special efforts to improve the educational situation of children, especially of girls. Thus, UNESCO was doing serious work in an area of concern to the Committee, which should seek to improve its cooperation with that body.

15. The CHAIRPERSON said that she would be happy to attend the International Conference on Population and Development, but thought that it would be helpful if another member of the Committee could also attend, in view of the numerous activities that would be taking place at that event.

16. Mr. HAMMARBERG noted that UNESCO had recently entrusted two commissions with developing new policies in the field of education and culture, and it would be useful if those commissions had a text from the Committee underlying the importance of the rights of the child in those two areas. The time was ripe for closer cooperation with UNESCO.

17. He proposed designating several members of the Committee to keep the others informed on developments concerning preparations for the above-mentioned conferences. He suggested appointing Mr. Mombeshora for the International Conference on Population and Development, Mrs. Eufemio for the World Conference on Women and Mrs. Belembaogo for the World Summit on Social Development.

18. The CHAIRPERSON said that if there was no objection, she would take it that Mr. Mombeshora, Mrs. Eufemio and Mrs. Belembaogo were willing to assume that task.

19. It was so decided.

20. Mr. KOLOSOV said that he had recently spoken with a UNESCO official in Moscow and had criticized that body for not having been helpful enough in assisting the Committee in its work. That official had replied that although a number of major States might soon be returning to UNESCO, a financial improvement of that body's situation was unlikely before 1995, and the Committee should not expect cooperation with UNESCO to grow before then.

21. The CHAIRPERSON said that it was her understanding that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sometimes covered UNESCO's expenses. Perhaps something could be arranged along those lines so that UNESCO could attend meetings. The Committee must ask UNDP and the World Bank to attend its meetings, not just the one-day discussions.

22. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that a short report might be drafted on the results of the World Conference on Human Rights, with particular reference to areas of relevance to the Committee.

23. The CHAIRPERSON said that a number of activities at the World Conference had hinged directly on the work of the Committee. Delegations had repeatedly referred to the rights of children and of women. UNICEF had made an important statement, and she had also spoken on behalf of the Committee. There had been a meeting of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on child labour and of UNESCO on education. Children had participated in the children's day organized by the World Conference. Children had also taken part in the NGO Forum. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights (document A/CONF.157/23), had focused on children's rights, in particular in paragraph 21 and in the section on the rights of the child, covering paragraphs 45 to 53.

24. Mr. KOLOSOV said that he did not understand the reference in the last sentence of paragraph 50 of that document calling on the Committee to study the question of raising the minimum age of recruitment into armed forces; he wondered whether the World Conference had been informed that the Committee had already considered that issue at its third session.

25. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that the Committee had submitted a contribution to the preparatory process for the World Conference and to the World Conference itself, in which it had emphasized the importance of that question. She interpreted the sentence to mean that the World Conference, recognizing the importance of the issue, had decided that the Committee should consider

formulating a proposal on raising the minimum age of recruitment into armed forces. That was an encouragement for the Committee to improve upon the draft optional protocol.

26. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that he had raised the same matter in Vienna; his impression had been that some had been aware of the Committee's initiative, while others had not. The Committee should therefore interpret the last sentence of paragraph 50 not to mean that it should undertake an in-depth study of the problem as such, but that it should follow up the proposal made by Mrs. Santos Pais and table the draft optional protocol for further discussion.

27. Mr. KOLOSOV reminded the Committee of its decision at the previous session to lobby influential delegations during the session of the Commission on Human Rights with a view to encouraging that body to take an initiative on the matter. He had personally approached the Russian delegation but it did not appear to have made any move. He wondered whether the preliminary draft optional protocol might be reissued as a working document for the next session of the Commission with an explanatory reference to the World Conference's request to the Committee.

28. In reply to a question from the CHAIRPERSON, Mrs. KLEIN-BIDMON (Centre for Human Rights) said that such a move should be feasible.

29. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS pointed out that the member States of the Commission on Human Rights had adopted by consensus resolution 1993/82 which, inter alia, encouraged States to raise the age of recruitment to 18. Those same States had addressed the further request to the Committee at the World Conference in paragraph 50 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and she felt that it should be taken seriously. Continuous dialogue was needed to secure support for measures aimed at promoting implementation of the resolution.

30. Mr. HAMMARBERG, referring to the request, also in paragraph 50 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, for a major United Nations study of means of improving the protection of children in armed conflicts, said that Governments were at present conferring on the possibility of drafting a separate resolution on that subject. If such a resolution materialized, it would be a step of major importance, implying a general review of standards, perhaps even those established under the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. In that context, a cooperative effort on the part of UNICEF, other United Nations agencies and all parties involved would be essential.

The public meeting rose at 4 p.m.